



Improving the Health of Public Aquatic Lands

A PROPOSED HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FOR STATE-OWNED AQUATIC LANDS

The people of Washington own 2.6 million acres of aquatic lands that lie beneath our state's navigable lakes, rivers, and marine waters, and estuaries. These publicly-owned aquatic lands are managed for the all people of the state for many benefits. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is manager and steward of the state's aquatic lands and works to ensure their sustainability into the future. We have a long-term commitment to restore and protect these ecosystems that people and wildlife depend upon.

Healthy waters are paramount to the people of Washington — and to DNR. Our public aquatic lands are a critical resource for maintaining healthy habitat for wildlife, and a foundation of our economy, quality of life and the natural heritage we will pass to generations to come.

DNR is working with the Puget Sound Partnership to restore the health of the Sound by 2020. As called for in the Partnership's 2020 Action Agenda, DNR is developing a Habitat Conservation Plan that will guide management activities of the public's aquatic land for 50 years to protect water quality and habitat so diverse aquatic ecosystems thrive.



Kayakers enjoying Puget Sound near Cypress Island. DNR promotes water dependent uses such as boating while protecting the environment.

Habitat Conservation Plan

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will help DNR fulfill its responsibility to the people of Washington by protecting species that have been listed as at risk of extinction under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) while providing the flexibility for creative solutions. At the same time, DNR and those that lease public aquatic lands for private purposes, receive federal assurances of compliance with ESA. The proposed HCP for Washington's public aquatic lands focuses on protecting the nearshore environment that is crucial for the health of the entire ecosystem. The proposed conservation plan addresses the impacts of shade, sediment compaction, disruption of the flow of water and sediment, contamination and noise on public lands managed by DNR.

Proposal for a future with habitat protection and management certainty

The proposed Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan will help protect and restore Puget Sound, our river systems, and other state aquatic lands statewide by guiding management activities that:

- Avoid or minimize adverse impacts to species protected by the Endangered Species Act on the public's aquatic lands.
- Provide long-term certainty and stability for those who lease the public's land for private purposes - potentially reducing their risks and encouraging investment.
- Provide habitat mitigation or 'compensation' for unavoidable impacts through either rectifying the impact, or restoring other nearby (and like) habitat.
- Preserve the benefits from economic and recreational uses of the public's aquatic lands.

CONTACT: Wade Alonzo | Aquatic Lands Division

Washington State Department of Natural Resources | 1111 Washington St. SE | PO Box 47001 | Olympia, WA 98504-7001
Phone 360-902-1013 | E-mail: wade.alonzo@dnr.wa.gov | January 2010 | FS09-012

Science-based decisions build the HCP

The proposed Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan is based on more than 2,000 references including over 1,400 peer-reviewed articles. This information provides the guidance for adopting conservation measures so that DNR's management will reduce environmental impacts to aquatic species and improve the health of aquatic ecosystems on public aquatic lands.

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DNR has written the first draft of the proposed HCP with the input of a broad range of scientists, industry experts, tribal representatives, conservation organizations, and agency representatives. We also worked with the Federal Services (National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) as we investigated conservation options. DNR staff continues to meet with all interested parties.

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Moving forward to begin important changes

DNR is legislatively mandated to protect the environmental health of aquatic lands in its care and is committed to working with the Puget Sound Partnership to clean up the Sound by 2020 and protect it into the future.

To best comply with the laws and commitments, we utilize the best available scientific literature to guide our leasing decisions. The scientific research carried out for the HCP indicates that specific measures need to be applied to uses of state-owned aquatic lands. Therefore, where appropriate, DNR will begin working closely with lessees to incorporate appropriate measures for their specific site and circumstances into use authorizations as they come up for renewal. This individual, negotiated approach will allow DNR to work with lessees to achieve the conservation goals in ways that work best for each lessee.

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